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Reluctant powers? Rising powers' contributions to regional crisis management

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ABSTRACT

Rising powers have often been characterised as 'reluctant' when it comes to their contributions to global governance. However, also within their regions they have sometimes pursued indecisive, muddling-through policies, including in the field of security. This paper addresses the puzzling issue of rising powers' reluctant approach to regional crisis management. It conceptualises reluctance as entailing the two constitutive dimensions of hesitation and recalcitrance, and it seeks to approach a theorisation of reluctance that focuses on a combination of international expectations and domestic preference formation. The empirical analysis addresses instances of regional crisis management by the democratic rising powers India and Brazil during phases of domestic political stability under the Modi (2014–2018) and the Lula (2003–2011) governments, respectively. The analysis of India's crisis management efforts in Afghanistan and Nepal, and of Brazil's leadership of the MINUSTAH mission and its approach to the civil war in Colombia, reveal that reluctance emerges if a government is faced with (competing) expectations articulated by international actors as well as with a range of domestic factors that lead to unclear preference formation.

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Introduction: reluctant powers?

Great expectations have been associated with the emergence of 'new' powers in world politics since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Such expectations have come primarily from policy makers, who have expected rising powers to contribute to the provision of global public goods, given their success in terms of economic growth, their increasingly proactive foreign policy and their claims for great power status.¹ Academic debates have to a certain extent reflected this kind of discourse, with scholars discussing rising powers' often limited contributions to global governance – think of rising powers' insistence on common but differentiated responsibilities on climate governance or of their ambivalence on global crisis management. As Bisley suggests in this special issue, this might be due to them being 'poor great powers', lacking the capabilities to assume a managerial function in global politics. Or we could at least argue that rising powers are particularly careful about cost–benefit

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calculations in global public goods provision and tend to privilege domestic developmental needs. For example, rising powers have focused on the protection of their economies in global trade negotiations and they have long tended to prioritise industrialisation over climate change mitigation efforts.²

However, while the costs of burden sharing seem to be an important factor in explaining rising powers' high degree of reluctance towards contributing to public goods at the global level, things look different at the regional level. 'Rising powers' like India, Brazil or South Africa tend to be the dominant countries within their regions³ and we could certainly expect them to have the capabilities to influence their regional neighbourhood as well as a high degree of interest in its stability. It is at the regional level that the costs of providing public goods are likely to be consistent with these countries' ability to provide them. We could therefore expect rising powers to contribute to the provision of regional public goods in a much more decisive and clear-cut manner as compared to the global level.

However, the empirical reality looks different: rising powers have sometimes been reluctant to engage in their regions,⁴ including in the field of crisis management. This contribution builds upon a previous conceptualisation of 'reluctance' in world politics and develops it to flesh out its causal elements with the aim of theorising the drivers of reluctance. To explain varying reluctance, it focuses on a combination of international expectations and unclear domestic preferences. In the empirical analysis, the explanatory power of such a proto-theory of foreign policy reluctance is assessed with reference to four cases of regional crisis management by the democratic rising powers India and Brazil. The analysis focuses on periods in which these countries could be unequivocally considered as 'rising' and had stable governments, that is, on phases during which reluctance is particularly puzzling. For the case of India, it addresses regional crisis management under the government of Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (2014–2018), which, together with its coalition partners in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), has a stable majority in the lower house of Parliament (Lok Sabha); India at the same time has remained one of the few emerging powers with remarkably high growth rates. For Brazil, the focus is on regional crisis management during the years of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party (PT) (2003–2011), a period of domestic political stability during which Brazil increasingly came to be recognised as a rising power and pursued an active foreign policy.⁵ The analysis confirms that reluctance emerges if there are obstacles to the formation of clear domestic preferences and international expectations cannot be met.

Reluctance and the impact of (competing) expectations and unclear preferences

Reluctance is ubiquitous in world politics. Indecisiveness, delaying, muddling through, disappointing the expectations of partners – these and similar attitudes are commonplace among international actors, but the phenomenon of reluctance has been largely ignored by the literature in the field of International Relations (IR). This is all the more surprising as the term is rather frequently used, not only with regard to rising powers, but also for example to the US.⁶ Only recently, a conceptualisation of reluctance was developed,⁷ but we still lack any kind of theorisation about what leads international actors to be reluctant. This contribution aims to flesh out such causal dimensions of the concept of reluctance. As Goertz

points out in his seminal work, social science concepts always entail a causal dimension, and concept building is deeply interlinked with theorising.⁸

According to Destradi, reluctance can be understood as an analytical category that helps us grasp a 'peculiar *type* or *style* of foreign policy that can be found across issue areas and settings'.⁹ Reluctance entails two constitutive dimensions, which are both necessary and jointly sufficient: hesitation and recalcitrance.¹⁰ Reluctance is a relational concept that always refers to an interaction between different actors. While the dimension of hesitation is focused on the 'self' – on an actor's own internal dynamics – the second constitutive dimension of reluctance, recalcitrance, refers to an interplay with the 'other(s)'.

Hesitation describes an ambivalent, indecisive attitude and is operationalised as entailing at least one of the following indicators: a *lack of initiative*, which is particularly relevant if we want to analyse how rising powers react to crises in their regional neighbourhood where they are the predominant actors; *delaying*, which amounts to not sticking to a previously set time frame or to 'postponing important decisions in dealing with a specific issue or crisis';¹¹ or *flip-flopping*, which involves frequent or sudden changes in policies or statements, or contradictions, for example among the statements of members of the same government.

The second constitutive dimension of reluctance, recalcitrance, captures an unwillingness or inability to conform with the expectations articulated by others, and thereby reflects the elements of obstructionism and resistance that resonate with the notion of reluctance. Recalcitrance can be operationalised as entailing at least one of the following indicators: *ignoring requests* made by others or expectations articulated by others, in our specific analysis with reference to crisis management; *rejecting* such requests, that is, explicitly denying one's commitment; *obstructing others' initiatives* without providing a consistent alternative given one's parallel hesitation.¹²

Both dimensions, hesitation *and* recalcitrance, need to be in place in order to classify a policy as reluctant. Both of them can occur to different degrees, thereby entailing a continuum and making reluctance, as well, a continuous concept.¹³ It has to be noted that, while reluctance in the political discourse is sometimes associated with a negative connotation, this contribution aims to use 'reluctance' as an analytical tool to grasp a particular type or style of foreign policy making that is not reflected in other existing concepts in IR. Importantly, reluctance does not simply amount to a passive foreign policy strategy. For example, a consistent refusal to get involved in a military dispute would not count as reluctant behaviour as it lacks the dimension of hesitation.¹⁴ Japan and Germany's approach to the use of military force in the decades after World War II would similarly not count as reluctance according to this understanding since it was a clear and coherent policy course. Generally speaking, the opposite of reluctance would therefore be a determined and consistent (as opposed to hesitant) as well as responsive (as opposed to recalcitrant) foreign policy.¹⁵

Why does reluctance occur or, in other words, what leads governments to pursue reluctant policies? As suggested by Goertz, an explanation is inherent in the concept itself and, conversely, looking for such explanation helps us further develop the concept. In the case of reluctance, the two related but discrete constitutive dimensions of hesitation and recalcitrance play a causal role in explaining the occurrence of reluctance. The dimension of hesitation – with its indecisive, delaying, flip-flopping attitude – can be expected to contribute to the explanation of reluctance via domestic factors, which might prevent a government from following a determined and consistent course of action. The dimension of recalcitrance – that is, the fact of not conforming to others' expectations – implies that such expectations

play a role in driving reluctance as well. In the field of international politics, we will focus on expectations by international actors. Importantly, as we will see, such domestic and international factors are deeply interrelated.

International expectations can be of different kinds. Particularly powerful states will be faced with an especially broad range of expectations given their potentially superior problem-solving ability, and particularly severe crises can be expected to generate more expectations concerning their resolution. Rising powers will be faced with expectations articulated by established powers, for example when it comes to participating in global public goods provision. At the same time, they will face expectations by their immediate regional neighbours, which might request them to commit to the solution of regional problems and the provision of regional public goods, but which might also feel threatened by their sheer power preponderance and wish that they avoid meddling with regional affairs.¹⁶ Competing expectations by different international actors will be particularly challenging as compared to homogeneous expectations. As ultimately governments will always be the object of international expectations concerning their foreign policy, but as not all of them are always reluctant, international expectations do not seem to be a sufficient condition for the occurrence of reluctance. In fact, if such expectations meet clear domestic preferences, the government might choose to ignore them and to pursue a consistent course of action (or, as we will see below, it might pursue a reluctant policy in order to appease competing expectations).

Foreign-policy preferences will crystallise as a result of a domestic process and are analytically and '[...] by definition causally independent of the strategies of other actors and, therefore, prior to specific interstate political interactions, including external threats, incentives, manipulation of information, or other tactics'.¹⁷ By choosing one policy option and by pursuing a determined and consistent course of action, the government will not be hesitant. It might be recalcitrant, if it disappoints some (or all) international expectations, but this will not be a sufficient condition for reluctance.

While clear domestic preferences that dovetail or clash with homogeneous international expectations will therefore lead to non-reluctant policies, we now need to specify under what conditions reluctance, understood as a combination of recalcitrance and hesitation, will emerge.

At the domestic level, there are several factors that might lead to hesitation. Among them is, first, simple government weakness. Lacking a clear majority or being dependent on coalition partners will make it more difficult to pursue consistent and determined courses of action. In this paper, the empirical analysis explicitly focuses on stable governments in order to control for this factor as far as possible.

Second, problems within the bureaucracy might have similar consequences.¹⁸ Despite a robust majority, a government might end up being hesitant because its bureaucracy lacks capacity or preparedness, leading to coordination problems with the centre or simply to an inability to take initiatives or to delays in policy making. Moreover, even a capable bureaucracy might be overwhelmed by too much information, an 'increasing number of tasks', 'too many goals' and 'no agreement on the best means',¹⁹ which will lead to the adoption of cognitive shortcuts to cope with complexity. It will be particularly likely in policy areas that are new to an emerging power or in severe crisis situations, since the bureaucratic and decision-making apparatus will likely lack the knowledge necessary to develop a clear policy position, while at the same time being forced to provide a quick response.

Finally, hesitation might emerge (and possibly be reinforced by international expectations) as a consequence of domestic arguing over competing norms.²⁰ We can identify indications of this explanation if we observe domestic actors using references to different normative foundations of foreign policy while they argue over the best course of action to follow. Such normative tensions are generally likely in rising powers as these countries try to adjust their policies to their changed (or changing) international status. Conformity with predominant international normative standards is likely to favour status gains, but might clash with established domestic norms, leading to sometimes contradictory, zig-zagging policies (hesitation). While this explanation of hesitation does not necessarily only apply to democracies, as such political struggles also take place within elites in authoritarian regimes, it nevertheless highlights that reluctant policies are often an outcome of a genuinely democratic political process of negotiation and perhaps reflect the very essence of democracy. However, normative tensions might also emerge as a result of path dependency in the way a country's bureaucracy conceives of foreign policy. For example, if a decades-old commitment to certain norms on the part of the bureaucracy clashes with a new normative approach on the part of the executive, this might lead to hesitant policies.

Since reluctance by definition involves a relational aspect, hesitation (driven by the above-mentioned domestic factors) needs to be paired with recalcitrance in the interaction with international actors. In other words, in order to be *reluctant*, foreign policy will involve not conforming to some international expectations. At the international level, a government might be faced with either homogeneous or competing expectations, depending on whether all relevant actors expect it to adopt the same kind of policy or whether different actors expect different things from it. Such actors can be, for example, international partners, relevant institutions or powerful competitors. If homogeneous expectations meet clear preferences, this will lead to non-reluctant policies, as was mentioned above. By contrast, homogeneous expectations in combination with unclear domestic preferences will lead to reluctance since extremely hesitant, flip-flopping policies will almost automatically disappoint international actors.²¹

If competing expectations by external actors meet unclear domestic preferences, we will obviously have a combination of recalcitrance and hesitation because the government will be torn apart between different expectations and will not have a clear own policy course.

To conclude, there is an additional explanation for reluctance, in which international expectations have a more explicit causal primacy. It refers to cases in which a government has a clear domestic preference, but is confronted with competing expectations. These might put it under such strong competing pressures that it will not be able to consistently implement its preferred policies; or it might consciously choose to pursue a hesitant policy (lack of initiative, delaying, flip-flopping) to conform to several of such different expectations. In other words, in the latter case, the government will try to appease, at least temporarily, as many actors as possible, but in that process, it will make contradictory decisions or adopt delaying tactics (hesitation). At the same time, as it will be impossible to appease everybody, recalcitrance about conforming to some of those expectations will inevitably emerge. The underlying assumption here is a rationalist one, and reluctance is used in a strategic manner. In fact, in some cases, reluctant policies help governments to keep international criticism and opposition at bay for a while by appeasing multiple competing expectations, or they allow them to buy time to collect additional information.

The following case studies of India and Brazil's regional crisis management will provide a first assessment of the plausibility of such explanations of reluctance focused on international expectations and domestic preferences.

India under Modi: still a reluctant crisis manager in South Asia

After an unsuccessful interventionist phase in its neighbourhood in the 1980s, India has pursued a much more low-key approach to regional crisis management in the South Asian region since the 1990s. South Asia is an extremely difficult regional context: it is one of the least institutionalised regions in the world, with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) confined to political irrelevance due to the conflict between India and Pakistan. At the same time, the region is characterised by a huge asymmetry between India and the other regional countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka), which has led to hostility and suspicion towards New Delhi on the part of its smaller neighbours.²² Overall, India has not been able to contribute to regional cooperation in a meaningful way and has pursued reluctant policies in the management of several regional crises. Despite the introduction of his 'neighbourhood first' policy²³ and initial positive signals such as the invitation of all South Asian heads of state and government to his inauguration as prime minister,²⁴ Modi has not managed to reverse this trend.²⁵ In the following, the analysis will focus on India's reluctant approach to crisis management in Afghanistan and Nepal under Modi's government.

Afghanistan is the most conflict-ridden country in South Asia and, since the conclusion of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission and the handover of the responsibility for Afghanistan's security to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in 2014, the situation on the ground has worsened; the Taliban have expanded their presence again, and new groups such as the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) have gained a foothold in the country.²⁶ Under the United Progressive Alliance governments of Manmohan Singh (2004–2009 and 2009–2014), India became Afghanistan's fifth-largest donor and was able to further expand the goodwill it enjoyed among the Afghan population through a mix of large-scale infrastructure projects (e.g. the Delaram-Zaranj highway, the Salma Dam and the new Parliament building in Kabul), small development projects and a well-established scholarship programme.²⁷ By contrast, in the field of security, India's policies were extremely reluctant as New Delhi pursued a hesitant (flip-flopping) and recalcitrant (rejecting and ignoring requests) approach on the provision of military equipment and cooperation requested by the Afghan government, including a failure to implement a 2011 Strategic Partnership Agreement in the subsequent years.²⁸

Under Modi, not much has changed. India has a continued interest in the stabilisation of Afghanistan; it needs to avoid that the country becomes a base for terrorists able to carry out attacks against India, and it would like to see Afghanistan as a connectivity bridge to Central Asia.²⁹ However, Modi has not managed to bring about a substantive shift towards a more determined and responsive Indian policy. India's approach can still be classified as hesitant, as New Delhi did not take any initiatives to devise new ways to contribute to stabilising Afghanistan. While, in an apparently significant policy shift, India in 2015–2016 for the first time donated lethal military equipment to Afghanistan (four Mi-25 attack helicopters in addition to three HAL Cheetah light utility helicopters),³⁰ such support to the Afghan Air

Force came quite late, and in early 2018 all military helicopters delivered by India were reportedly grounded and needed repairs. According to Afghanistan's Ambassador to India, 'at times requests have been delayed for too long' to the disappointment of Kabul.³¹ In March 2018, the Indian government agreed to buy four more refurbished Mi-24 helicopters for Afghanistan from Belarus,³² and India has agreed to further support the Afghan Air Force through a trilateral cooperation with Russia, from where most spare parts need to be purchased.³³ However, requests for the delivery of other lethal military equipment have been denied so far.

In the case of Afghanistan, India's continued reluctance can be explained through the combination of competing international expectations and unclear domestic preferences. The Afghan government, with the exception of the initial months of Ashraf Ghani's presidency,³⁴ has been calling for greater engagement on the part of India in matters of weapons deliveries and of security more generally. Such requests were increasingly backed by Western countries, especially the US and the UK, which have been 'pushing India for a larger economic, but primarily military role.'³⁵ In particular, US President Trump went 'a step ahead [as compared to previous administrations] by openly inviting India to have an active role in Afghanistan.'³⁶ Such expectations however clash with those of Pakistan, which understands any kind of Indian engagement in Afghanistan as a vital threat to its own security.

Such competing international expectations have been met with unclear domestic preferences over Afghanistan in India. In fact, New Delhi is interested, on the one hand, in keeping its own influence on Afghanistan. On the other hand, it wants to limit Pakistan's influence over the country and therefore does not limit itself to an exclusively development-oriented approach. Instead, by signing a Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan, the Indian government has shown that it also aims to be engaged in matters of security. At the same time, the Indian government is aware that a more extensive security engagement would provoke its nuclear-armed rival Pakistan, which has long considered Afghanistan a hinterland that provides 'strategic depth' in the case of a war with India.³⁷ Pakistan and its proxies have in the past reacted violently to India's engagement in the country, as shown by repeated attacks on Indian personnel in Afghanistan. New Delhi's continued reluctance in conflict management in Afghanistan can therefore be explained by a combination of the need to balance between diametrically opposite international expectations (by the Afghan and Western governments, on the one hand, and by Pakistan, on the other) and unclear domestic preferences in India, which have prevented New Delhi from drastically curtailing its engagement. India's reluctance is not 'strategic' in the sense of appeasing competing expectations, as discussed above. It is rather a consequence of an interplay between international expectations and domestic arguing over competing norms. While there is a broad consensus among the Indian elite against any kind of 'boots on the ground' option,³⁸ other forms of engagement are debated rather explicitly by 'partisans' and 'conciliators' in the Indian establishment.³⁹ The Indian bureaucracy continues to stick to a 'Nehruvian' strategic culture focused on non-intervention, leading to a high degree of path dependency.⁴⁰ But at the same time, the BJP government of Prime Minister Modi has sought to side-line Nehruvian discourses and has rather relied on Hindu-nationalist ideology, which calls for a more 'muscular' approach to foreign policy. India's declining recalcitrance on the issue of lethal weapons supplies under Modi could be a first indicator of the formation of a more explicitly interventionist preference with regard to Afghanistan, which however still remains linked to the need to avoid outright war with Pakistan.

In the case of Nepal, the analysis focuses on a serious domestic political crisis related to the adoption of a new constitution. After the devastating earthquake of April 2015, Nepal's main political parties decided to speed up the constitutional process to replace the 2007 interim constitution, which had been adopted after the end of Nepal's civil war and the country's transition to democracy. The new constitution was passed on 20 September 2015, amid huge protests by disadvantaged groups dissatisfied with several of its provisions, which were considered to perpetuate the dominance of traditional upper caste hill elites.⁴¹ Among the protesting groups were the Madhesi and Tharus of southern Nepal's Terai, a region that borders India and whose inhabitants have huge affinities toward their Indian neighbours. The protests went on for months, with over 50 casualties, mostly due to police firing into crowds. In that context, the otherwise open border between Nepal and India was closed for 135 days by Madhesi protesters, and the interruption of supplies originating from the blockade led to a humanitarian crisis.⁴²

India's approach to crisis management in Nepal is almost a textbook case of reluctance understood as hesitation and recalcitrance. As Jha puts it, India's policy was characterised by 'inconsistency, ad-hoc policy making, multiplicity of power centres, conflicting messages, and absence of will'.⁴³ Moreover, India was recalcitrant all over again when it came to requests articulated by different political actors in Nepal, which were repeatedly disappointed. India has a long history of political meddling in Nepal and over the past decades has repeatedly struggled to keep its influence on that country, which in turn has sought to attenuate its dependence on India by seeking closer ties with China.⁴⁴ During the constitutional crisis, the Indian government followed an extremely contradictory policy. Initially, New Delhi supported the Madhesi's concerns and India's Foreign Secretary Jaishankar was sent to Kathmandu to put pressure on Nepal's government to delay the adoption of the new constitution and to make it more inclusive.⁴⁵ Later, India tacitly supported the blockade,⁴⁶ leading to disappointment and to a rapprochement with China on the part of the K. P. Oli government in Kathmandu. But the fear of losing its influence on Nepal to China ultimately led New Delhi to 'prod[...] the Madhesi to withdraw the blockade'.⁴⁷ In a new twist to its Nepal policy, in July 2016, India persuaded the Maoist leader Prachanda to withdraw from the governing coalition in Kathmandu, thereby side-lining the excessively China-friendly Prime Minister Oli, while it later 'pushed the Madhesi parties to participate in elections – even though they were deeply uncomfortable with the constitution, almost making a two year policy exercise futile'.⁴⁸ Ultimately, New Delhi's contradictory approach to Nepal under Prime Minister Modi led to a massive deterioration of bilateral relations and after the victory of the Left Alliance in Nepal's parliamentary elections in late 2017, India–Nepal relations reached a historical low.⁴⁹

How can we explain India's highly reluctant policies in dealing with the crisis in Nepal? As opposed to the case of Afghanistan, domestic politics in Nepal were not a concern to the international community during the period analysed, so the only international expectations the Indian government was confronted with were those of different political actors in Nepal. But those expectations were highly divergent and, given the looming threat of growing Chinese influence in Nepal, they were taken seriously by the Indian government. Given India's long history of political influence on Nepal, any Indian move is an object of heated debate in Nepal, and India is the first international actor Nepalese parties and civil society seek help from, blame or just refer to, depending on the situation.⁵⁰ The political elites in Kathmandu therefore had expectations vis-à-vis India during the crisis (most notably, that it end its

support for the Madhesi cause), the Nepalese government put pressure on India by 'playing the China card', and the marginalised groups in the Terai made use of their close relationship to the Indian population across the border to get New Delhi's support. Such competing expectations met unclear domestic preferences in India concerning the course to follow in Nepal. Some of them were related to a lack of bureaucratic capacity, which contributed to coordination problems in the way different sections of the Indian elite dealt with Nepal. Generally speaking, India's foreign policy capacity is limited by huge institutional deficiencies, including a tiny diplomatic corps⁵¹ and individualistic decision making on the part of powerful foreign service officers.⁵² Due to such capacity constraints and the ensuing lack of strategic planning, in cases like relations with Nepal, a range of actors who have direct ties to local elites tend to take over India's foreign policy.

Relatedly, in the case of Nepal there were underlying normative tensions among different constituencies in India. The Indian political landscape has long been fragmented in its approach to different sections of Nepal's society, from the hill elites to the army to the Maoists.⁵³ Within India, one particularly powerful constituency was the Hindu nationalist camp around the governing BJP, which had an interest in supporting Nepal's old elites (and even in reviving the Nepalese Hindu monarchy) to the detriment of the inclusion of minorities, especially the Madhesi.⁵⁴ However, as in the case of Afghanistan, the path-dependent Nehruvian notion of non-interference might have played a role in preventing India from openly intervening in a consistent manner. At the same time, the dramatically growing Chinese influence on Nepal and the need for India to counter it to keep its traditional sphere of influence (and against the backdrop of its declared 'neighbourhood first' policy) contributed to the difficulties in reaching a clear set of preferences vis-à-vis competing expectations from Nepal. As a result, the Modi government, despite its stability, ultimately pursued a reluctant approach.⁵⁵

Brazil under Lula: determination and responsiveness in regional crisis management

Under President 'Lula' da Silva (2003–2011), Brazil became an increasingly active international player, with a clear intention to gain international recognition for its status as an emerging great power and a recognisable aspiration to regional leadership. Other than India, Brazil was not reluctant when it came to the management of conflicts and crises in its region. This analysis focuses particularly on Brazil's role in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) from 2004, and on its engagement in the Colombian civil war between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (FARC) and the Colombian government during the years of the Lula presidency. Besides a range of domestic political crises in several South American countries, these were the two most severe crises in Brazil's extended neighbourhood during that period.

In the case of MINUSTAH, Brazil shed its initial reluctance, took over the leadership of this UN peacekeeping mission and pursued it without much hesitation or recalcitrance. A range of other South American countries participated in the mission under Brazilian leadership.⁵⁶ For the Brazilian government, crisis management in Haiti was a welcome opportunity to show its commitment to the United Nations – and government representatives explicitly depicted leadership in MINUSTAH as a way to gain international acceptance for Brazil's claim for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.⁵⁷ At the same time, taking over the

leadership of a UN peacekeeping mission was a remarkable development in Brazil's foreign and security policy, which had long been informed by a commitment to non-intervention.⁵⁸ In the case of MINUSTAH, the Brazilian government ultimately managed to pursue a predominantly consistent, non-reluctant policy course mainly because it could put forward a clear preference by allaying domestic fears and criticism in a process of arguing over the norms driving the mission, while at the same time aligning international expectations by global and regional actors.

At first, however, some elements of hesitation, and particularly some inconsistencies in Brazil's policies, could be observed in its approach to the crisis in Haiti. In fact, Brazil initially refused to participate in a Multinational Interim Force established with UNSC Resolution 1529 (on which it had voted in favour) citing this resolution's reference to Chapter VII, which allows for the use of force without the consent of the parties involved. Brazil's argument was that it could not participate in a mission to 'impose peace', among other things due to the provisions in Article 4 of its Constitution.⁵⁹ However, two months later Brazil agreed to participate in the multinational force under Resolution 1542, even though this resolution was equally based on Chapter VII.

The Brazilian government had initially been subjected to different international expectations. The US was not interested in further meddling with the situation in Haiti and its representatives were reportedly aware that a US presence in Haiti would be met with resistance.⁶⁰ France, the former colonial power, had similar concerns, and President Chirac called President Lula on the phone in March 2004 to ask for Brazil taking over the command of the UN mission – a wish that had the backing of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.⁶¹ While global-level actors therefore wanted Brazil to intervene, regional countries were very sceptical of such a mission (see, for example, criticism by countries like Chile and Argentina).⁶² Domestically, the formation of a clear preference was initially hampered by a debate on the mission to Haiti, which was criticised (among others by intellectuals, MPs, representatives of unions and social movements, as well as by some members of Lula's PT) as an occupation force violating Haiti's sovereignty and reinforcing US hegemony.⁶³

Ultimately, however, the Brazilian government managed to achieve a clear preference. A domestic coalition of diplomats and the military, which had an interest in Brazil's leadership of MINUSTAH as a tool to get international recognition and to 'maximize institutional gains',⁶⁴ respectively, managed to get support among the public and the parliament. Brazil therefore could pursue a determined, non-reluctant policy. The Brazilian government justified its bending to international pressure and its agreement to lead the multinational force under Resolution 1542 by arguing that in this Resolution, Chapter VII was mentioned only in one section and not in the introduction, and therefore it did not refer to the entire resolution.⁶⁵ Through this reinterpretation, the Brazilian government managed to frame MINUSTAH as a peacekeeping operation and to 'claim that [Brazil] was mostly concerned with humanitarian tasks and Haiti's development'.⁶⁶ This 'rhetorical exercise'⁶⁷ was an important move for reconciling contrasting international expectations and giving a direction to the domestic normative debate about Brazil's foreign engagement.⁶⁸

The most virulent 'traditional' armed conflict in South America over the past decades has been the civil war in Colombia. Also in this case, the Brazilian government under Lula pursued a fairly consistent, not hesitant and thereby non-reluctant, approach to crisis management – albeit in a very different form, privileging low-key offers of mediation and support. Throughout the period analysed and even beyond, Brazil consistently defined the conflict

as a domestic matter of Colombia, thereby refusing external interventions, and expressed support for a negotiated solution, in line with its own constitutionally-sanctioned foreign policy norms.⁶⁹ In that context, Brazil repeatedly offered to serve as a mediator and tried to portray itself as a neutral actor by condemning the FARC's crimes, but at the same time not declaring the FARC a terrorist organisation, which would have limited the room for negotiations.⁷⁰ Moreover, Brazil repeatedly provided logistical support in the liberation of hostages.⁷¹ Overall, Brazil's interest in the conflict in Colombia was mostly related to the limitation of potential spill-over effects along the common border, given repeated cases of incursions by members of FARC into Brazilian territory and their connections to sections of the Brazilian drug mafia.⁷²

Some elements of moderate recalcitrance were in place in Brazil's policy since Brazil was not ready to follow the Colombian government's call for labelling the FARC a terrorist organisation.⁷³ Brazil was also critical of US meddling with Colombia's affairs and of the militarisation related to Plan Colombia, and it wanted to avoid a further internationalisation of the conflict. However, under the Lula government, Brazil's approach to the Colombian civil war displayed no indicators of hesitation (lack of initiative, delaying or flip-flopping). Overall, therefore, Lula's Brazil followed a non-reluctant approach based on consistent but low-key offers of support. It could arguably do so because it developed a clear preference on the modalities of conflict resolution and, at the same time, it was not subject to competing international expectations. The Colombian government called for a labelling of the FARC as a terrorist organisation, but did not articulate other expectations concerning a more active Brazilian involvement in the conflict. This was mainly due to the ideological differences between Lula and Colombian President Uribe (2002–2010), which contributed to make the two countries 'distant neighbours'.⁷⁴ Only gradually did bilateral relations improve, as from 2009 Uribe got less support for his hard-line approach to the conflict from the US under the Obama administration, and therefore had to rely more on regional partners such as Brazil.⁷⁵ An indication of such improving relations was Uribe's decision to join the UNASUR Defence Council, which had been founded in 2009 at Brazil's initiative as a reaction to Colombian strikes against FARC camps on Ecuadorian territory.⁷⁶ This rapprochement, which continued under Colombia's president Santos, did not lead to specific calls for greater Brazilian engagement. Similarly, neither the US nor other international actors put pressure on the Brazilian government concerning crisis management in Colombia. In Brazil's domestic debate, conservative actors accused the Lula government of being too sympathetic to the FARC,⁷⁷ but generally there was a rather broad consensus among Brazil's political forces about pursuing a low-key approach to the Colombian conflict without getting enmeshed militarily.⁷⁸ All these factors ultimately allowed Brazil to pursue a non-reluctant approach to crisis management.

Conclusion

This contribution aimed to address the sometimes puzzling phenomenon of powerful countries that pursue hesitant, muddling-through, indecisive – 'reluctant' – courses of action when it comes to the management of crises in their neighbourhood that have the potential to adversely affect their interests and potentially even to destabilise them. To this end, the paper built upon a conceptualisation of reluctance based on the two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of hesitation and recalcitrance, and it proposed an explanation for

reluctance based on international expectations and domestic factors. In a first effort at theorising reluctance, it was hypothesised that governments will tend to adopt reluctant policies if they face expectations by international actors and, at the same time, do not have clear domestic preferences due to factors like government weakness, lack of bureaucratic capacity or domestic arguing over foreign policy norms. In the case of competing international expectations, they might also use a flip-flopping approach to temporarily appease different expectations. The empirical analysis focused on India and Brazil as 'rising powers' during phases of domestic political stability, and particularly on instances of regional crisis management by these two countries. It revealed that diametrically opposite expectations by international and regional actors concerning India's security engagement in Afghanistan, in combination with domestic normative debates and corresponding difficulties in devising clear preferences, have led to New Delhi's highly reluctant policy. In the case of Nepal's constitutional crisis, reluctance has been the outcome of competing expectations by different Nepalese actors, paired with lack of bureaucratic capacity (coordination problems) and normative disagreements in India. By contrast, Lula's Brazil was able to pursue a proactive and consistent policy towards Haiti by framing the mission in a way that allayed domestic concerns and aligned different international expectations. Brazil's approach to the conflict in Colombia reveals that a low-key engagement, if consistently pursued, does not amount to reluctance. In this case, Brazil had a clear preference for mediation and other forms of limited support, and it was not faced with competing international pressures.

Based on these initial findings on varying reluctance in India's and Brazil's regional crisis management efforts, further research will need to refine the proto-theory of reluctance developed in this contribution and to address a broader range of cases across different world regions. An analysis of longer-term trends is also a promising area of future research. In fact, reluctance might be deeply intertwined with rising powers' very process of 'rise', with its peculiar combination of increased international expectations (and sensitivity to them for status reasons) and domestic debates or insecurities about the new tasks related to growing power capabilities and international recognition. Further research will therefore need to study how reluctance varies over time and to what extent it might hamper rising powers' regional and global ambitions.

At the same time, reluctance is certainly not confined to rising powers or to the regional level of analysis. Powerful international actors, including established powers, often pursue hesitant and recalcitrant policies when it comes to global public goods provision. A better understanding of what drives reluctance in those cases could make a major contribution to addressing some of the most pressing problems of our time.

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Notes

1. On the notion that with power comes responsibility, see Zoellick, "Speech." The term 'rising powers' should be used carefully against the backdrop of massive domestic crises in countries like Brazil and South Africa. It will nevertheless be employed in this study as the focus of the empirical analysis is on periods that were generally considered to be phases of international ascendancy for rising powers.
2. Hochstetler and Milkoreit, "Responsibilities in Transition"; Narlikar, "Peculiar Chauvinism or Strategic Calculation?" On rising powers' likely impact on global governance, see Kahler, "Rising Powers and Global Governance."
3. On these countries as 'regional powers', see for example Nolte, "How to Compare Regional Powers."
4. For example, on Brazil's unwillingness to fully engage in South American regionalism, see Merke, "Neither Balance nor Bandwagon"; Burges, "Revisiting Consensual Hegemony." South Africa's engagement in southern Africa has similarly been described as 'full of ambiguities and contradictions'; Alden and Le Pere, "South Africa in Africa," 145.
5. Soares de Lima and Hirst, "Brazil as an Intermediate State"; Christensen, "Brazil's Foreign Policy Priorities"
6. Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff*; Fehl, *Living with a Reluctant Hegemon*.
7. Destradi, "Reluctance in International Politics."
8. Goertz, *Social Science Concepts*, 5.
9. Destradi, "Reluctance in International Politics," 323.
10. Ibid., 325–8.
11. Ibid., 327.
12. Ibid., 328. Correspondingly, the indicators of hesitation refer to an actor's own policies, independent of interactions with others, while the indicators of recalcitrance always relate to an interaction with other actors. Indicators like 'delaying' and 'obstructionism' are therefore analytically distinct: delaying primarily refers to previously set own goals and timeframes, while obstructionism (whether it involves a temporal dimension or not) is explicitly aimed at initiatives promoted by others.
13. Ibid., 328.
14. Ibid., 325.
15. According to Destradi, reluctance does not have a single negative pole, but two negative poles: determination and responsiveness; Ibid., 324.
16. On the contestation of regional powers' policies, see Ebert et al., "Contestation in Asia."
17. Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously," 519. This is, of course, a simplification needed for analytical reasons.
18. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this aspect to me.
19. Rathbun, "Uncertain About Uncertainty," 546.
20. Risse, "International Norms."

21. Competing expectations will by definition lead to recalcitrance, as not all of them can be addressed at the same time. But without the dimension of hesitation, this does not amount to reluctance.
22. Destradi, *India's Foreign and Security Policy in South Asia*, 56–61.
23. Passi and Bhatnagar, "India, India's Neighbourhood and Modi."
24. Swami, "Modi Invites Saarc Leaders."
25. On the more general issue of continuity and change under Modi, see Chatterjee Miller and Sullivan de Estrada, "India's Rise at 70"; Hall, "Is a 'Modi Doctrine' Emerging?"; Hall, "Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy."
26. International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: Growing Challenges."
27. Sinha, "Rising Powers and Peacebuilding," 137–45.
28. Destradi, "India: A Reluctant Partner for Afghanistan."
29. Mahalingam, "India's Afghanistan Policy," 105.
30. Gady, "India's Plans to Buy Helicopter Gunships."
31. Haidar and Peri, "Afghan Army Chief Coming to India."
32. Laskar, "India Will Provide 4 Mi-24 Choppers."
33. Wagner, "India's Bilateral Security Relationship," 18.
34. Das, "Afghanistan's Relations with India and Iran."
35. Taneja, "India and the Afghan Taliban."
36. Ranade, "Trump's Afghanistan Strategy," 3.
37. Destradi, "India: A Reluctant Partner for Afghanistan," 106.
38. Ibid., 109.
39. Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 206–10. The notion of 'uncertainty' in decision making does not seem to have much explanatory power as during the period analysed the situation in Afghanistan did not present entirely new challenges that might have caught the Indian bureaucracy or government off guard.
40. Hall, "The Persistence of Nehruvianism." Among the many works on strategic culture in India, see Tanham, "Indian Strategic Culture"; Bajpai, "Indian Strategic Culture."
41. Jha, "Nepal's Constitutional Politics."
42. International Crisis Group, "Nepal's Divisive New Constitution."
43. Jha, "How India Steadily Lost."
44. Destradi, *India's Foreign and Security Policy in South Asia*, 96–128.
45. Majumder, "Why India Is Concerned."
46. Jha, "India Must Firmly Push for Madhesi Inclusion."
47. Jha, "How India Steadily Lost."
48. Ibid.
49. Kaura, "Grading India's Neighborhood Diplomacy."
50. For details on India's involvement over the years, see Jha, "A Nepali Perspective."
51. Markey, "Developing India's Foreign Policy Software."
52. Chatterjee Miller, "India's Feeble Foreign Policy," 14–16.
53. For example, in 2005, towards the end of Nepal's civil war, the Indian government supported the Royal Nepalese Army through training in its fight against the Maoist rebels, while the Ministry of External Affairs gradually came to embrace the notion of including the Maoists in the political process, and Indian politicians ultimately mediated a peace agreement between the representatives of Nepal's democratic parties and the Maoists with the support of the Indian government; Destradi, *India's Foreign and Security Policy in South Asia*, 112–13.
54. Muni, "With the Left Alliance."
55. As for Afghanistan, the notion of 'uncertainty' in decision making does not necessarily apply to the case of Nepal since India has a long experience in dealing with the troubled politics of that country and was not confronted by an entirely new type of crisis that could be interpreted as challenging the cognitive ability of policy makers.
56. Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay contributed troops. Colombia was among the contributors of civilian/police personnel.

57. Gauthier and John de Sousa, "Brazil in Haiti," 1. This connection was, however, denied by Brazil's Foreign Minister Amorim; Ministério das Relações Exteriores, "Entrevista Do Ministro Celso Amorim, 24/3/2008."
58. Christensen, "Brazil's Foreign Policy Priorities," 277.
59. Gauthier and John de Sousa, "Brazil in Haiti," 1.
60. Fernández Moreno et al., "Trapped between Many Worlds," 383.
61. Andrade, "Brasil Tem Tropa De 1.100 Militares."
62. Hirst, "La Intervención Sudamericana En Haiti."
63. cmi brasil, "Manifesto Da Campanha."
64. Harig and Kenkel, "Are Rising Powers Consistent or Ambiguous Foreign Policy Actors?" 636.
65. Ibid., 2.
66. Harig and Kenkel, "Are Rising Powers Consistent or Ambiguous Foreign Policy Actors?" 635.
67. Ibid.
68. Christensen, "Brazil's Foreign Policy Priorities," 277.
69. Ministério das Relações Exteriores, "Para Pinheiro Guimarães, Al Precisa De Um Plano Marshall."
70. Ministério das Relações Exteriores, "Íntegra Da Entrevista De Celso Amorim, 5/5/2008."
71. Candeas, "Brasil Y Colombia," 299.
72. Latinnews, "Tracking Trends."
73. Tarapués Sandino, "Colombia Y Brasil," 432.
74. Flandes, "Brasil-Colombia"; Soares de Lima and Hirst, "Brazil as an Intermediate State," 35.
75. Latinnews, "Colombia Reassesses Its Foreign Policy Priorities."
76. Ibid.
77. Latinnews, "Uribe's Diplomatic Influence Waxes."
78. Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos, "Tabelas."

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